

BOARD POLICY #114

Policy Title: Commutation of Sentence	Draft Date: January 22, 2015	Policy #114
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PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to outline the general procedures and guidelines associated with the eligibility and processing of Commutation of Sentence applications and subsequent Board determinations. Throughout this process, the Board's determination is final.

AUTHORITY:

ARS § 13-603(L)

ARS § 31-402

ARS § 31-411 (H)(I)(1)

ARS § 38-431.01

ARS § 31-403

PROCEDURE:

114.1 Eligibility & Exceptions

- 1.1 Inmates who are statutorily eligible or an inmate whose sentence does not require a minimum amount of time to be served may apply for apply for commutation.
 - 1.1.1 The Board will only consider those inmates who have served two (2) years from their sentence begin date and are not within one (1) year of their eligible or mandatory release date for sentences more than 3 years.
 - 1.1.2 The Board will not consider future (consecutive) sentences for commutation.
 - 1.1.3 The Board may consider inmates with less than three years sentence but only upon review and approval of the Chairman of the Board.
- 1.2 The exceptions to the Board time requirements are:
 - a. inmates seeking commutation under A.R.S. 13-603(L),
 - b. inmates seeking commutation under imminent danger of death, and
 - c. The Board has received a Warrant of Execution issued by the Arizona Supreme Court.

114.2 Application Process

2.1 Inmates must complete and sign the Commutation of Sentence application form adopted by the Board at the time of application. This application will be made available via:

- a. the Board's website,
- b. request by mail, and
- c. an inmate's Correctional Officer III.

2.2 Inmates shall transmit their completed application to the Department of Corrections for review and certification. Only those applications certified by the AZDOC as statutorily eligible for commutation will be forwarded to the Board for review.

2.2.1. Only applications found to be complete by the Executive Director will be scheduled for a Phase I Commutation Hearing. Incomplete applications or applications not meeting the requirements of this policy will be returned to the inmate stating the reason for refusal.

114.3 Imminent Danger of Death

3.1 The Board may waive the eligibility criteria and schedule a Phase II hearing if the inmate has been certified by the Arizona Department of Corrections in imminent danger of death application.

3.2 The inmate may only be certified imminent danger of death if a licensed medical doctor who is an employee of the Arizona Department of Corrections or is the Arizona Department of Corrections contracted medical provider designated to provide correctional health services deems there is reasonable medical certainty that the inmate's medical condition will result in death within six (6) months from the point of application.

3.2.1 A written statement, completed by the designated ADC licensed physician and/or attending physician, must be included with the application, must confirm the inmate's diagnosis, current medical condition and prognosis that the inmate has less than six months to live.

3.2.2 The physician certifying the condition of the inmate must be available to the board to provide testimony at the time of the commutation hearing. If the attending physician is not available then a physician associated and familiar with the condition of the inmate may testify in place of the attending physician.

3.2.3 Inmates will be notified on the Commutation of Sentence Application that their medical records may become public record and discussed in public forum during the commutation hearing. They shall acknowledge this notice by their signature on the application form.

114.4 Order of the Court A.R.S. § 13-603(L)

4.1 An order of the court pursuant to ARS § 13-603(L) provides:

- a. "If at the time of sentencing the court is of the opinion that a sentence that the law requires the court to impose is clearly excessive, the court may enter a special order allowing the person sentenced to petition the Board of Executive Clemency for a commutation of sentence within ninety days after the person is committed to the custody of the state department of corrections. If the court enters a special order regarding commutation, the court shall set forth in writing its specific reasons for concluding that the sentence is clearly excessive. The court shall allow both the state and the victim to submit a written statement on the matter. The court's order, and reasons for its order, and the statements of the state and the victim shall be sent to the Board of Executive Clemency."

4.2 If and after a 603L commutation request hearing is held and if the board's determination is not to recommend a commutation of sentence to the Governor, then no further commutation of sentence application will be considered by the Board until three years have passed from the date of the most recent denial.

114.5 Notification

5.1 When a commutation from imprisonment is to be considered, the Board, before holding a

commutation hearing, shall notify the attorney general, the

Presiding Judge of the Superior Court, the County Attorney in the county in which the inmate requesting commutation was sentenced. The victim of the offense for which the inmate was incarcerated shall also be notified.

5.2 The notice to the victim shall be mailed to the last known address no less than 15 days prior to the hearing date. The notice shall state the name of the inmate and shall set the month of the hearing. The notice shall inform the victim of the victim's right to be present and/or to submit a written report to the board expressing the victim's opinion concerning the commutation of sentence.

5.3 A commutation hearing shall not be held until at least fifteen (15) days passed after the date of sending the hearing notice to the victim. On mailing the notice, the board shall file a hard copy of the notice in the Board's inmate file as evidence that notification was sent.

5.4 The provision of this subsection requiring notice to the government officials shall not apply where there is imminent danger of death certified commutation request or when the term of imprisonment is within two hundred ten (210) days of expiration.

115.6 Commutation Hearing Process

6.1 Except as provided in exemptions of this policy, commutation hearings will be held in two phases. For those inmates convicted of their offense on or after January 01, 1994 the Board may recommend to the Governor for commutation of sentence after finding by clear and convincing evidence that the sentence imposed is clearly excessive given the nature of the offense and the record of the offender and that there is a substantial probability that when released the inmate will conform his/her conduct to the requirements of the law.

6.1.1. At least one week prior to a commutation hearing, the Board members will be provided the application, inmate's files, letters and all relevant information for review. Family, friends, victims, witnesses and/or legal counsel should submit written information concerning the matter prior to the hearing.

6.2. At the conclusion of the hearing, the Board may take one of the following actions:

- a) Find by a *majority vote* of the board members that there is no basis for further consideration on the application;
- b) Find by a *majority vote* of the board that the inmate should pass to Phase II or be recommended for commutation of sentence to the Governor if in a Phase II.

114.7 Recommendation

7.1. When the Board votes to recommend a Commutation of Sentence to the Governor, a letter of recommendation will be prepared by a Board member. The Board Chairman or, if not present, the Panel Chairman will assign someone who voted in the majority to prepare the recommendation letter to the Governor.

7.1.1. The letter shall include the conviction details of the sentence being commuted, the inmate's past criminal history, reason for the inmate seeking commutation and the Board members discussion and conclusion for the recommendation.

7.1.2. Once the letter has been finalized, the Board's Executive Director shall ensure that all the necessary documents and proper formatting of the Governor's packet is accurate and complete.

7.2 Letters of dissent may also be prepared and forwarded to the Governor by any Board member who voted contrary to the majority decision.

7.3 A letter of recommendation and if applicable, a dissent letter/s, along with the related case materials considered by the Board at the Phase I and II Hearings, shall be included in the packet of information sent to the Governor within 30 calendar days from the date that hearing was conducted.

7.4 Any recommendation for commutation that is passed *unanimously* by Board and that is not acted on by the governor within ninety days after its submission will automatically become effective.

7.5 Any recommendation for commutation that is made by a *majority* of the board members present shall be sent to the governor for consideration. There is no time limit for the approval or rejection of such a recommendation.

7.6 Upon receipt of the determination of the Governor, the inmate will be advised of the decision. The Executive Director shall ensure the board's records/files are updated.

7.7 If commutation is not granted, the inmate may reapply for commutation three years from the date of denial unless:

7.7.1 The three year waiting period is extended if the inmate's conviction is specified by A.R.S. 31-403 (E), for those committing serious offenses on or after January 01, 2006. Reapplication will be based on statutory requirements and timeframes set by the Board.

7.7.2. The Board may waive these provisions if any of the following applies:

- a. The person meets the conditions as outlined for imminent danger of death.
- b. The person is the subject of a warrant of execution.

Implementation:

This policy was adopted by the Arizona Board of Executive Clemency in accordance with the law.